

The Alarming Coal Situation

By ALBERT JAY NOCK

THE outlook for next winter's fuel supply is extremely bad and discouraging. For industrial purposes, taking hard and soft coal together, there is a considerable shortage in production, and this is beyond help. Any forecast that can be made for the domestic consumer who depends on hard coal alone is so complicated by provisos that there is simply no telling what his plight will be. The very best that can be said is this: that if we have an open winter and if transportation is adequate and if distribution is properly managed and if there is no further depletion of mine labor by the draft or by competition of other industries and if there are no more labor troubles, we shall have all around approximately within five per cent. as much domestic coal as we had last year. What its quality will be remains to be known. Last year, we remember, the Government's price-fixing experiment resulted in such a generous "sophistication," as the Italians say, with mine-rock and slate that such coal as we had was largely fireproof. The major anthracite companies—the railway-owned concerns—lay the blame for this upon the scandalous and unprincipled independent. This may be as it may be. The American householder has too much on his mind just now to trouble about fixing responsibility *ex post facto* for a peculiarly cruel and detestable swindle. We are much more interested to know whether Mr. Garfield has really devised a way to defeat this sort of thrifty enterprise hereafter; and this is precisely what we do not know. He maintains, or it is claimed for him, that he has done so; but there is nothing in our experience with Mr. Garfield so far to warrant more than a lively hopefulness that his plan may work.

The consumer may know from the foregoing, then, where he stands—he knows as much as any one knows. He may not know whether he will be able to keep his house warm next winter at whatever cost—no one knows that—but there may be at least a kind of melancholy satisfaction in getting acquainted with the elements of his problem. The weather next winter is beyond forecast or control; but the other elements are not. Production and transportation are manageable; moreover, they are in the hands of executives who cannot complain that their hands are tied in any way. The country has not only shown an almost incredible self-effacing prodigality in its bestowal of power, but it has consistently maintained a most handsome attitude towards its officials, in the face of intolerable inconvenience and distress. The people have been marvellously patient with them while they were learning their jobs, patient with all the slowness and failure and waste that are inevitably incidental to huge social experiments; with a poverty-stricken ineptitude in appointive offices and with costly bureaucratic machinery that proved ineffective. They have submitted without murmuring to the overnight imposition of an unprecedented increase in transportation costs. If enough anthracite coal is not mined or if it is imperfectly distributed, it will not be because the American people have been reluctant to delegate authority or unwilling to pay the bills. The consent of the governed has been given with no stepmotherly voice; and those who derive their just powers from it have had a full year in which to provide against any conceivable emergency, let alone the repetition of such a deplorable calamity

as came upon many sections of the country last winter. No executive could possibly ask more than this, and no executive may reasonably waive the corresponding responsibility.

About fourteen per cent. of the mine laborers have disappeared from the anthracite district; a majority of them have gone into the service, and more are being called. This points to an inexcusable lack of coördination between the Fuel Administration and the War Department. The business of the Provost Marshal General is to raise an army, and whatever comes to his mill is grist. He is for an impartial enforcement of the draft; it does not greatly concern him that he may be depleting an essential industry unless and until that industry is so declared by authority. The local exemption boards and appeal boards have made a moderately reasonable use of what discretion they have, but mine laborers are no more eager than other men to apply for exemption. Curiosity, the lure of adventure, the inarticulate yearning after whatever appears to promise a larger life, all have their weight with them as they have with others. The pressure of a morbid and unintelligent public opinion is as heavy against a "slacker" in the anthracite district as it is elsewhere, and the miners do not court it. It is said that the operators are not very forward in urging individual exemptions, and while there is no evidence of it as a set policy, it is probably true, in the main, as an instinctive natural reaction. The attitude of the operators is quite human. They are punctiliously doing what is asked of them, and doing it exceedingly well. They have established a record per-man production, and some are mining at less profit for the sake of getting out coal quickly—for example, out of veins that are easily accessible but so thin that according to the accepted scale of profits it does not pay to work them. They are quite content, however, to do the best they can as operators and keep as clear as possible from matters of general policy. Being able and experienced men, they have about the same degree of respect for Mr. Garfield that the veteran sea-dog has for the fledgling naval lieutenant; they obey diligently and perhaps do not consciously wish to see him discredited, but simply do not feel called on to play an officious second Providence to him in order to prevent it. They are quite well aware that the status of labor in an essential industry cannot be settled by any mere pottering with individual exemptions, and they respond in the premises with a more or less bored routine.

Meanwhile, mine labor is getting in a bad way. It is well known that actual mining is a highly skilled industry. The State of Pennsylvania requires a two years' apprenticeship to turn out a certified miner. Obviously, then, the certified miners who go into the service cannot be replaced; and even if the restrictions were taken off, it is equally clear that an admixture of unqualified men would be very bad for production. But aside from the certified miners, there are great numbers of men employed about the mines who mostly rank as low-grade laborers and yet cannot be replaced in any considerable labor turnover without retarding production. These are loaders, mule-drivers, bratticemen, carpenters, blacksmiths, and the like. One would say off-hand that a man who could drive mules along a canal could drive them anywhere; mule-driving is mule-driving. But, really, this is

not quite so—not in the anthracite mines. Inroads into low-grade labor can be made up after a fashion—if, indeed, we are not pretty rapidly coming to an end of our visible supply of such labor. But it cannot be done consistently with maximum production, and nothing short of maximum production will meet even the current demand for anthracite. It is an extremely disquieting observation that although normally there are at this time of year hundreds of thousands of tons in surface storage here and there in the anthracite district, there is to-day not a pound in sight. One comes away with the certainty that there must be some coordinate blanket policy fixed to abate the ruinous competition between Mr. Garfield and General Crowder in the anthracite labor market. This article has no policy to suggest; the zealous stupidity of eager amateurs is already a terrible burden for the country to carry, and we have no notion of adding our contribution to it. Some advocate an out-and-out conscription of labor in uniform, mildly administered, in order to do away with the social disabilities attaching to the "slacker," and some urge that coal-mining be declared an essential industry—pointing out that gold-mining has been so declared—and that a general exemption be extended. These propositions need not be discussed; they show their merits and demerits on their face. There remains the fact, however, which one sees to be open and notorious the moment one sets foot in the anthracite district, that if some accommodation is not effected, and effected at once, the domestic consumer's future looks very dark. One might perhaps suggest to President Wilson that the function of coördination in this case is properly his, and that he could accomplish it with a very slight outlay of time and energy. It is certain, at least, that the matter can no longer be left in the feeble hands of the Fuel Administration, nor is there any conceivable reason why it should be. A blind man could not play a hose ten minutes any noonday in front of the Scranton Club without drenching a dozen better executives than Mr. Garfield; and there are seasoned old operators in any number—Mr. May, Mr. Ingalls, Mr. Dorrance, for example—who are able to give the country the same order of service that Mr. Schwab has managed to provide in a like emergency. The indications, as the doctors say, are for a thorough reorganization of the Fuel Administration on the lines taken with the Shipping Board; the condition is quite as critical and the time quite as short.

The statistics of the situation are these: There is not so much labor in the anthracite district to-day as there was in 1914. The rate of depletion is shown by comparing the number employed in 1916 (177,000) with the number employed in 1917 (153,534). In 1917 the mine-workers' day was eight hours, while before the war and up to 1915 they worked nine hours, sometimes ten. The effect on production of the shortening of hours must be reckoned in with the effect of the labor shortage. The anthracite coal shipments from the district in 1917 came to a little under eighty million tons; but one-quarter of that was washery coal, dug out of culm-banks with a steam-shovel. Allowing for the heavy adulteration with incombustible material, the output of mined coal came to about forty-seven million tons last year—a falling off from the production of previous years.

The Fuel Administration urges various economies—and no one deprecates economy. In point of economy, however, the domestic consumers, especially among the poor—and the poor are in the great majority—have for many years been making a virtue of necessity. The fact that anthracite bears a

monopoly price has effectively schooled them in the admirable virtue that Mr. Garfield recommends. But with all due regard for economy, and cordial approval of most of Mr. Garfield's specific recommendations, it must be observed that he is at the same time permitting a depletion of unreplaceable labor to go on, without apparent care or protest. As long as this is so, the Fuel Administration's panegyrics on economy and dismal forebodings for next winter must inevitably lose a great deal of their force. Moreover, as long as this is so, it seems idle to discuss the other elements of the problem—transportation, storage, distribution, the possible demands of labor unions, and so on. Until coal is brought to the surface, it can be neither stored nor transported. It cannot be brought to the surface in sufficient quantities to fill an enormously increased demand as long as this depletion of skilled and semi-skilled labor is permitted to continue; and this depletion cannot be expected to stop until some kind of administrative arrangement is effected between the two branches of Government service that are now in collision. This collision was easy to foresee, easy to provide against; and the fact that it has been so long unforeseen or neglected is simply one more proof of Mr. Garfield's lamentable unfitness to control the comfort and welfare of our people in the position he now occupies.

Great Britain and the Economic War

By WILLIAM MACDONALD

EVER since the publication of the resolutions of the Paris Conference regarding an economic "war after the war," the question of the commercial and industrial relations between the Allied nations and the Central Powers after the peace has been increasingly discussed. In England, where the need for raw materials and shipping is joined to fear of "dumping" and "penetration," the discussion of the subject has been particularly active. The "Memorandum on War Aims," adopted by the Inter-Allied Labor and Socialist Conference in London on February 22, took strong ground against any kind of economic war, "either against one or other foreign nation or against all foreign nations," as inevitably leading to reprisals; and further demanded that "the main lines of marine communication should be open without hindrance to vessels of all nations under the protection of a league of nations." On the other hand, the "Memorandum" recognizes the right of each nation "to the defence of its own economic interests," and, in view of a probable world shortage of food, raw materials, and shipping after the war, to "the conservation for its own people of a sufficiency of its own supplies of foodstuffs and raw materials." The general policy, however, should be that of the open door, "without hostile discrimination against foreign countries."

The Committee on Commercial and Industrial Policy after the War, appointed in July, 1916, under the chairmanship of Lord Balfour of Burleigh, made public last May, through the Ministry of Reconstruction, a report which goes further in its indication of necessary restrictions. Premising that British producers are entitled to protection against "dumping," and that pivotal or "key" industries should be maintained "at all hazards and at any expense," the Committee recommended that the prohibition of the importation of